

## EXHIBIT A

# PROVISIONAL APPLICATION FOR PATENT COVER SHEET

This is a request for filing a PROVISIONAL APPLICATION FOR PATENT under 37 CFR 1.53(b)(2).

Docket Number	56490.000004	Type a plus sign (+) inside this box	+
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_____ Additional inventors are being named on the _____ separately numbered sheets attached hereto			
TITLE OF INVENTION (280 characters max)			
A PRODUCT CONFIGURATOR FOR ACQUIRING BRANDED PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS			
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ENCLOSED APPLICATION PARTS (check all that apply)			
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<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge filing fees and credit Deposit Account Number <u>50-0206</u>			

The invention was made by an agency of the United States Government or under a contract with an agency of the United States Government.

☒ No.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Yes, the name of the U.S. Government agency and the Government contract number are: \_\_\_\_\_

Respectfully submitted,

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**PROVISIONAL APPLICATION FILING ONLY**

## A PRODUCT CONFIGURATOR FOR ACQUIRING BRANDED PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS

### Field of Invention

5       The present invention relates to providing a method and system for specifying promotional products where product identifiers (e.g., SKUs) are created dynamically.

### Background of the Invention

10       Branded promotional products include advertising, sales promotion and marketing communications media that use merchandise imprinted with an advertiser's identification, message or logo. These items effectively communicate a brand identity or a message and are used to create brand awareness, solidify customer relations and increase sales. The branded promotional products sector of the advertising industry provides unique marketing opportunities. Branded products are easy to understand and are useful in meeting many marketing objectives  
15       such as announcing a name change or building a company image.

      The personal touch inherent in gift giving makes branded product advertising a high-impact tool when used in conjunction with other media. Typical uses include building brands, launching products, introducing reminder advertising, improving customer relations, generating new customers and/or accounts, increasing traffic and awareness at trade shows, safety programs,  
20       annual meetings, seasonal events, public relations, employee relations, and other advertising and marketing uses.

Branded promotional products are adopting a more active role in marketing as mass media such as print and television integrate with other promotional efforts. Because branded products provide a personal touch, they are effective and important marketing tools.

Customers increasingly expect more value from their purchasing experience with a high  
5 quality product that promotes their brand. They want a useful product obtained through a convenient transaction. Customers are often frustrated because they have to rely on a reseller for purchasing options and the flow of information. Resellers are expected to find customers favorable prices, produce samples and ensure timely delivery.

Currently, vendor partners have little or no contact with customers and rely on resellers to  
10 reach customers. Vendor partners spend significant amounts of effort and money providing price quotes and samples to resellers. It is difficult for vendor partners to gather product or customer market research and customer buying pattern information.

Traditionally, the promotional products industry has operated under a linear supply-chain model of distribution. Typically, the customer hires a reseller to assist in selecting a branded  
15 product for an event or promotion. The reseller locates the desired merchandise through established vendor partner relationships. The vendor partner manufactures or imports the items, adds the brand, and ships the product. Business service partners provide services such as shipping, financing, and insurance. Media partners deliver educational and other useful information.

20 Currently, a standard method for specifying promotional products has been difficult to employ due to the uniqueness of products and numerous possible product and artwork

combinations. A company or other entity may regularly purchase promotional products for advertisement and other purposes. Furthermore, a company may promote new products on a regular basis as well as frequent improvements on current products. Therefore, repeated orders for promotional products may be required for similar products with different printing processes, for example. Similarly, the same or similar printing process may be used on different products. Due to the overlap in items and processes, inefficiencies may occur when ordering promotional or other products, especially when orders are frequently repeated. Oftentimes, an entity may attempt to define all possible product SKUs when ordering promotional products.

These and other drawbacks exist with current systems.

### Summary of the Invention

An object according to the present invention is to overcome these and other drawbacks with existing systems.

Another object of the invention is to provide a standard method of specifying promotional products and/or any other office product which can be configured using separate parameters.

Another object of the invention is to create SKUs (or other product identifier) dynamically including the steps of separating the products into items and processes (or other categories), specifying item parameters, specifying process parameters, dynamically linking an item and process, and creating a SKU when an item is sourced, quoted, or ordered.

Other objects and advantages of the present invention will be apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art upon reviewing the specification herein.

**Brief Description of the Drawings**

FIG. 1 is a flow diagram of an item and process specification method according to an embodiment of the present invention.

5 FIG. 2 is an example of a screen shot of an administrator page of a product configurator according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 3 is an example of an item template according to an embodiment of the present invention.

10 FIG. 4 is an example of a product manager page according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIGs. 5a and 5b are an example of an item definition page according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 6 is an example of an administrator page according to an embodiment of the present invention.

15 FIG. 7 is an example of a process template according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 8 is an example of a product manager page according to an embodiment of the present invention.

20 FIGs. 9a and 9b are an example of a process definition page according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 10 is an example of an item template according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIGs. 11a and 11b are an example of an item definition page according to an embodiment of the present invention.

5 FIG. 12 is an example of an image upload page according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 13 is an example of a process template according to an embodiment of the present invention.

10 FIGs. 14a and 14b are an example of a process definition page according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIGs. 15a and 15b are an example of an item definition page edit according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 16 is an example of a data model according to an embodiment of the present invention.

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#### **Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiments**

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## Product Configurator Overview

### Promotional Products

Promotional Products are useful or decorative merchandise imprinted with an advertiser's identification, message or logo artwork. One can imprint artwork using numerous processes on virtually any kind of item.

A promotional product will usually have at least 2 components

- an item – e.g. a mug
- a process – e.g. Screen Printing

### Artwork

Customer Artwork used in the imprint process has specifications such as

- number of colors
- Imprint locations on the item – determined by item
- Imprint sizes – determined by item

### Promotional Product Definition

Presently, there is no standard method of specifying promotional products as they are so varied and numerous.

### *Corporategear Approach*

The Corporategear (CG) approach to defining products is unique. Instead of attempting to define all possible product SKUs, CG creates the SKUs dynamically. The approach is

- Separate the products into items and processes
- Specify item parameters
- Specify process parameters
- Dynamically link an item and process and create a SKU when an item is sourced, quoted, or ordered.



### Pricing Algorithm

The pricing algorithm depends on the item and associated process chosen. In general, the pricing is based on the production specifications. The manufacturing specifications for a particular promotional product do not “exist” until a shopper has specified

- the item parameters
- the process parameters
- the client’s artwork parameters

### Items / Process Templates

CG separates the item + process specification method into levels using templates.

- CG supplies the standard Corporategear item/process templates
- A Vendor Administrator takes the Corporategear item/process templates and creates item/process definition pages
- A Vendor Product Manager enters the item/process specifications and pricing using these item/process definition pages
- Items and processes are matched based on materials

### *Industry Data*

To assist in defining items and processes, CG provides tables of standard data used throughout the industry. Examples include Industry Colors, Materials, and Extra Charges. The objective is to establish industry standards. These data will be updated by CG. Please refer to the Data section for examples and further details.

## Product Configurator Setup and Users

### *Setup*

- The product configurator function is set up when a Vendor Website is configured
- 4 digit Vendor ID automatically created

### *Vendor Administrator and Product Manager*

#### *Administrator Functions*

- Create/Delete/Edit Vendor Item/process Templates
- Has access to complete system

#### *Product Manager Functions*

- Add/Edit/Delete Items and Processes
- Upload art images for items and processes

### *Product Configurator Access*

The Product Configurator is accessed from the CG Home Page. Refer to the registration and login procedures for details.

## Corporategear Item Templates and Data Entry

CG provides Corporategear Item Templates

- CG provides an Corporategear Item Template for each item category
- One Item Corporategear Template may be used for numerous item categories – e.g. see Data section, Corporategear Templates
- E.G. mugs and stress balls will use the same Corporategear Item Template but with the heading “Mugs” or “Stressballs”

Step One: Select an “Item Category” – an item Corporategear Template, see Exhibit A

- The Administrator selects an “Item Category” to add an Item Definition Page into their database

Item Category Options

- Add
  - Displays list of available “Item Categories” e.g.
    - Mugs
    - T-Shirts
    - Baseball Caps
  - The drop down contains a list of “Item Categories” associated with Corporategear Item Templates available in the CGExchange.
  - Selecting an “Item Category” goes to the Corporategear Item Template page for that category
- Edit/Delete
  - Displays list of existing Item definition pages
  - Selecting a Item definition page displays the associated Corporategear Item Template with Administrator specifications previously entered
  - If items exist that were created using this item/process definition page

- No changes/deletions can be made
- Display message when trying to edit

Items exist based on this page, please create a new page

- Display message when trying to delete

Items exist based on this page, please delete items first

- If no items exist that were created using this template
  - All specifications can be changed or deleted
  - Deletion - display a message to confirm deletion

Step Two: Using the selected Corporategear Item Template for that "Item Category", create the Item definition page for that category, see Exhibit A-1

- The Administrator creates an Item definition page using an Corporategear item Template
- The Administrator specifies the descriptive and pricing characteristics applicable to the item they sell
- An administrator can create several Item definition pages using the same Corporategear Item Template
- E.g. Corporategear item Template Mug can generate Item definition pages for
  - Mugs - Standard (steel)
  - Mugs - Travel (plastic)
- Each Item Definition Page can have only one associated material

Step Three: Select an "Item." to add/edit/delete, see Exhibit PM

#### New Item

- System displays a dropdown of existing item/process definition pages
  - Name is combination of Item category + subcategory + material
    - E.g. Mugs – Two handle (plastic)
- Select goes to the Item definition page previously created by the Administrator

#### Edit/Delete

- Dropdown of existing items in the Product Configurator
- Existing item data can be edited/deleted
- Select displays the existing Item data

#### Delete

- The existing information displays
- Display a confirm delete message

Step Four: Enter an item using a Item definition page, see Exhibit PM-

- A particular Item definition page contains the vendor's range of parameters for the selected items
- Used to enter a unique item

Fields in Item definition page may vary depending on what the Administrator Specified.

Price Fields in Item definition page may vary depending on the Corporategear Item template used to create it – e.g. Mugs will have different pricing entry matrices than T-shirts. See Product Configurator Fields and Page Rules as well as Template and Pricing Matrix Sections for description of fields.

## Corporategear Process Templates and Data Entry

CG provides Corporategear Process Templates

- CG provides an Corporategear Process Template for each Process category – e.g. see Data section, Corporategear Templates
- One Process Corporategear Template may be used for several Process categories
- E.G. Screen Printing and Pad Printing will use the same Corporategear Process Template but with the heading “Screen Printing” or “Pad printing”

Step One: Select a “Process Category” – a Process Corporategear Template, see Exhibit A

Note this is the same methodology as for items

- Add
  - See methodology for Items
  - Examples in the list of available “Process Categories” associated with Corporategear Process Templates available in the CGExchange:
    - Pad Printing
    - Screen Printing
    - Etching
- Edit/Delete
  - See methodology for Items
- If processes exist that were created using this process definition page
  - Display message when trying to edit  
Processes exist based on this page, please create a new page
  - Display message when trying to delete



Step Two: Using the selected Corporategear Process Template for that "Process Category", create the Process definition page for that category, see Exhibit A-P

- Same methodology as for Item
- Process template and definition pages can be associated with several materials

Step Three: Select a "Process" to enter/edit/delete, see Exhibit PM

New Process

- Same methodology as for Items
  - o Name is combination of Process category + subcategory
    - E.g. Screen Printing - Standard

Edit/Delete

- Same methodology as for Items

Step Four: Enter a Process using a Process definition page, see Exhibit PM-P

- Same general methodology as for Item

Fields in Process definition page may vary depending on what the Administrator Specified.

Price Fields in Process definition page will vary depending on the Corporategear Process template used to create the Process – e.g. Screen Printing will have different pricing entry matrices, variables, and names than Embroidery. See Product Configurator Fields and Page Rules as well as Template and Pricing Matrix Sections for description of fields.

## Product Configurator Fields and Page Rules

### *General Rules for all Template Pages*

#### *Design*

Layout the pages in the following order

- Name + description
- Size/color/attributes that do not affect price
- Quantity Price Breaks
- Add on pricing factors
- Descriptive factors, e.g. union made

#### *Rules for CG templates*

##### Quantity Breaks for Corporategear Templates

- Allow 10 quantity breaks
- First Break is Sample for an item. Processes do not have samples
- if max=0, upper bound is open
- max of a quantity break cannot overlap with then min of next break except for the sample quantity break

#### Function

##### Save

- Add Corporategear template with vendor category specifications to the database i.e. Create Item/process definition page
- This Item/process definition page will be used to enter a specific item/process

#### *Rules for CG Item templates*

##### Colors

- CG provides a list of standard colors
- CG will add colors as they are required by vendors

- The color multiple select displays the complete list

### *Item/Process Definition Pages*

See Template and Pricing Matrix section for further details

#### *General*

- Vendor Item/Process ID
  - Vendor can specify alpha-numeric id
- Item/Process Name
  - Short description of the item
- Item/Process Description

#### *Specific to Item*

- Colors
  - Multiselect of colors selected by administrator when creating item definition page
  - Select colors that apply to this item

#### *Specific to Process*

- Materials
  - Multiselect of materials selected by administrator when creating process definition page
  - Select materials that apply to this process
- Imprint Size limitations
- Over Imprint Size Charge – part of pricing, but appears here

#### *Pricing*

The size of and variables within the pricing matrix will vary according to the type of item/process and specifications made by the administrator on the Corporategear Item/Process Template.

- Pricing matrix
  - Enter prices for quantity breaks and other variables displayed
- Less than minimum charge

- Rush Charge
- Other Charges defined by Administrator

Note: prices can be entered for NET, CASE, MFSP, and OTHER.  
 Programmers note - These "price types" are stored in a table allowing renaming as well as an unlimited number of types.

### Pricing for processes

There are generally two main types of charges for processes:

- Run charges
- Setup charges

The specific names of these charges and the variables affecting them vary depending on the type of process – i.e. the Corporategear Process Template used to create the Process definition page.

The run and setup charges may require matrices to enter pricing information.

The size of and variables within the pricing matrices will vary according to the type of process and specifications made by the administrator on the Corporategear Process Template. E.G:

- Embossing will have a run charge based on quantity break and number of colors per location
- Embroidery will have a run charge based on quantity and number of stitches

### Other Pricing for processes

- Over Imprint Charge appears above
- PMS Color Match
- Personalization Charge
- Production Proof Charge
- Paper Proof Charge

### Specifications specific to Items - Imprint Locations

- Locations each specified by Administrator
- Imprint Sizes for location

#### Specifications specific to Items - Shipping Information

- Weight per item
- Weight per case
- Items per case
- Case width
- Case height
- Case length

#### Production Times

- Regular production time
- Rush production time

#### List Price

- List Price – entered for NET, CASE, MSRP, and Other
- Description of List price

#### Other

- Country of manufacture
- Whether union made

#### Save

- Records the item/process just entered

#### Cancel

- Returns to Product Manager page without saving record

#### *Images*

- When saving – message displays  
Would you like to upload an image now?
- If yes

Upload 3 item/process images – see Exhibit PM-Image

- Small, medium, large

### *Item/Process Edit Page*

- See Exhibit PM-I-Edit for example of Item Edit Page
- Corporategear ID (appears on edit)
  - Automatically assigned CG# when record was saved
  - Concatenation of
    - CG
    - 4 digit Vendor ID
    - sequential number as products created for Vendor
- The existing item/process information in the Item/Process Definition Page format displays
- Any information can be changed
- Clicking on Image links to Image upload page but with confirmation before

Are you sure you want to upload a new image?



## Corporategear Data

The following tables of Industry data provided by CG are available as of 04/05/00:

### Industry Colors

- A table of colors for all items/processes

Industry Colors
White
Black
Red
Green
Blue
Yellow
Navy Blue
Ash
Brown
Forest Green
Tan
Off-White
Denim
Khaki
Purple
Taupe
Charcoal
Heather Gray
Olive
Wine
Silver
Gold
Black / White
Blue / White
Red / White
Red / Black / White
Black / Silver / White
Blue / Silver / White
Yellow / Red / Blue
Blue / Green / White
Red / Blue / White

### Industry Sizes

- table of available sizes for clothing

Industry Clothing Sizes
XXS
XS
S
M
L
XL
XXL
XXXL

#### Industry Materials

- A table of materials out of which items are produced

Cotton
Polyester
Nylon
Vinyl
Rubber
Steel
Aluminum
Chrome
Brass
Glass
Crystal
Ceramic
Plastic
Leather

Simulated leather
Wood
PVC
Paper

#### Extra Charges

- A table of extra charges common in the industry

Less than min
Rush
Personalization
Production Proof
Paper Proof
PMS Color Match
Miscellaneous 1
Miscellaneous 2

#### Extra Charge Type

S
%

#### Extra Charge is added per

Item
Job

Color
Location

#### Corporategear Item Templates

- one Corporategear Item template is set up for several types of Items with the same characteristics
- Amongst others, templates as of 04/05/00 are set up for

#### Corporategear Item Template A used for

Mug
Stressball
Calculator
Portfolio
Clock
Keychain
Mousepad
Paper Weight
Stuffed Animal
Radio
Lanyard
Pen
Candle
Towel
Bag

#### Corporategear Item Template B is used for

T-shirt
---------

#### Corporategear Process Template

- one Corporategear process template is set up for several types of processes with the same characteristics

Process Template #1 used for

Screen Printing
-----------------

Pad Printing
--------------

Process template #2 used for

Embossing
-----------

Debossing
-----------

*Process template #3 used for*

Embroidery
------------

Other embodiments and uses of the invention will be apparent to those skilled in the art from consideration of the specification and practice of the invention disclosed herein. The specification and examples should be considered exemplary only.

**A PRODUCT CONFIGURATOR FOR ACQUIRING  
BRANDED PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS**

**Abstract**

5       A method and system for providing a product configurator for branded promotional products are disclosed. A promotional product may comprise two or more components which may include an item and a process. An item may involve a product to which an imprint or logo is to be affixed. A process may involve a screening printing process or other process for affixing a customer's artwork, logo or identifier. The present invention provides a product configurator  
10   for creating SKUs (or other product identifier) dynamically which may involve separating the products into items and processes (or other categories), specifying item parameters, specifying process parameters, dynamically linking an item and process, and creating a SKU when an item is sourced, quoted, or ordered.

15

# Logic Flow

## Product Configurator Logic Flow

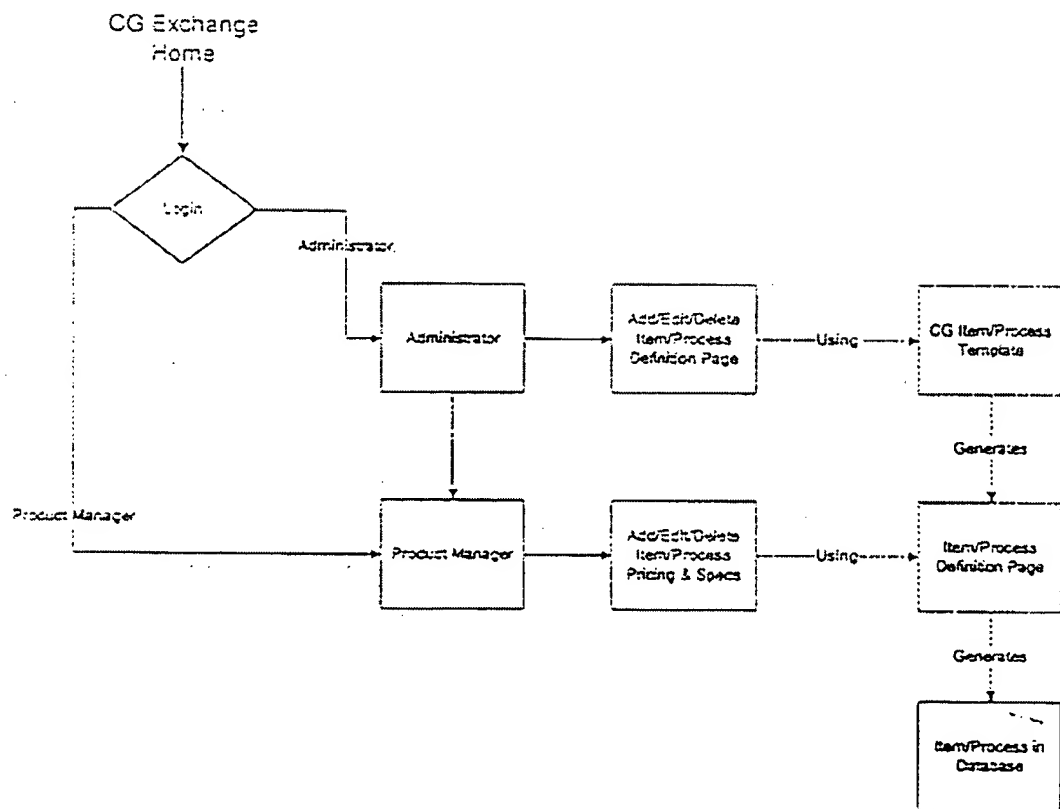


FIG. 1





## Product Configurator

### Administration Menu

Administrator | Product Management | Home

#### Product Category

Add

Edit None Available

Delete None Available

Administrators,  
create new product  
and process  
templates

#### Process Category

Add

Edit None Available

Delete None Available

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# Product Configurator

New Corporate Gear Item Template - Mugs

## Goods Category Information - Mugs

Sub Category

Colors

Ash  
 Black  
 Blue  
 Brown

Material

## Quantity Break Pricing Information

	Minimum	Maximum		Minimum	Maximum
Sample	<input type="text" value="1"/>	<input type="text" value="2"/>	Break 1	<input type="text" value="100"/>	<input type="text" value="500"/>
Break 2	<input type="text" value="501"/>	<input type="text" value="1000"/>	Break 3	<input type="text" value="1001"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>
Break 4	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>	Break 5	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>
Break 6	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>	Break 7	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>
Break 8	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>	Break 9	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>

Create process &  
 template message  
 goes here.

## Miscellaneous Pricing Information

Misc Charge 1 ☒ \$ ☐ %

Name

Misc Charge 2 ☐ \$ ☐ %

Name

Less Than Min Charge ☒ \$ ☐ %

Rush Charge ☐ \$ ☒ %

## Imprint Positions

<input type="text" value="Front"/>	<input type="text" value="Handle"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Save | Cancel

FIG.3



## Product Configurator

Product Manager - ABC Promotions

Administrator | Product Management | Home

### Create New

Product



Process

None Available

Product Managers -  
Choose your own  
product or process  
template and start  
entering  
specifications.

### Product Maint.

Edit

None Available

Delete

None Available

### Process Maint.

Edit

None Available

Delete

None Available

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FIG. 4



## Product Configurator

New Product - Mugs - Travel (Plastic)

## General Information - Mugs - Travel (Plastic)

Product Name Plastic Travel Mug

Vendor ID Number ABC001

Item Description Ideal for on the road thirst

Colors

Black

Blue

Brown

## Quantity price break values

## Net Pricing

1 - 2	\$15.00
100 - 500	\$9.00
501 - 1000	\$8.00
1001 - +	\$7.00

## Miscellaneous price break values

Gift Box \$ \$1.00 per item

Less Than Min Charge \$ \$2.00 per item

Rush Charge % 20 per job

Enter your Vendor  
Service Station

## Imprint Positions



Front



Handle

2 x 2 in. 0 x 0 in.

FIG. 5a

### Shipping Information

Weight per item	Weight per case	Items per case
<input type="text" value="5"/> lbs	<input type="text" value="50"/> lbs	<input type="text" value="100"/>
Case width	Case height	Case length
<input type="text" value="12"/> in.	<input type="text" value="12"/> in.	<input type="text" value="12"/> in.

### Production Time(s)

Regular Prod.	Rush
<input type="text" value="14"/> working days	<input type="text" value="7"/> working days

### Production information

List Price	\$ <input type="text" value="\$7.00"/> per item
List Description	<input type="text" value="Price does not include processing"/>
Country of Manufacturer	<input type="text" value="China"/>
Union Made	<input type="text" value="No"/>

Save | Cancel    Net | Case | MSRP | Other |

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Fla. 5b



## Product Configurator

### Administration Menu

Administrator | Product Management | Home

#### Product Category

Add

Edit

Delete

Administrators,  
create new product  
and process  
templates

#### Process Category

Add

Edit

None Available

Delete

None Available

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FIG. 6

Exhibit A-P

Corporategear Process Template – Administrator specifies Process  
Definition Page parameters 04/12/00

## Product Configurator

New Process Template - Screen Printing

Administrator | Product Management | Home

## General Information - Screen Printing

Sub Category Number of Colors 

Process on Material

Aluminum  
Brass  
CeramicOver Imprint Size Add ☐ \$ ☒ % ☐ Process Not Available

## Quantity Break Pricing Information

	Minimum	Maximum		Minimum	Maximum
Break 1	<input type="text" value="100"/>	<input type="text" value="1000"/>	Break 2	<input type="text" value="1001"/>	<input type="text" value="1500"/>
Break 3	<input type="text" value="1501"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>	Break 4	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>
Break 5	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>	Break 6	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>
Break 7	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>	Break 8	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>
Break 9	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>	Break 10	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>

Create process &  
template message  
goes here.

## Miscellaneous Pricing Information

Setup Charge ☒PMS Color Match ☒Misc Charge 1 ☒ \$ ☐ %  Name Misc Charge 2 ☐ \$ ☐ %  Name Less Than Min Charge ☐ \$ ☒ % Rush Charge ☐ \$ ☒ % Metallic Thread  
Charge ☐ \$ ☐ % Misc Charge 3 ☐ \$ ☐ % Misc Charge 4 ☐ \$ ☐ % 

Save | Cancel

FIG. 7



## Product Configurator

Product Manager - ABC Promotions

Administrator | Product Management | Home

### Create New

Product

Process

Product Managers -  
Choose your own  
product or process  
template and start  
entering  
specifications.

### Product Maint.

Edit

Delete

### Process Maint.

Edit None Available

Delete None Available

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Exhibit PM-P Process Definition Page - Product Manager enters Process information 04/12/00



# Product Configurator

New Process - Screen Printing - Standard

## General Information - Screen Printing - Standard

Process Name

Vendor ID Number

Process Description

Process on Material

Imprint Limitations

x  In. or larger than  x  In.

Over Imprint Size Add

%

## Quantity price break values

### Net Pricing

	1 Color	2 Color	3 Color
100 - 1000	<input type="text" value="\$0.50"/>	<input type="text" value="\$0.90"/>	<input type="text" value="\$1.30"/>
1001 - 1500	<input type="text" value="\$0.40"/>	<input type="text" value="\$0.78"/>	<input type="text" value="\$1.10"/>
1501 - +	<input type="text" value="\$0.30"/>	<input type="text" value="\$0.65"/>	<input type="text" value="\$0.80"/>

Enter your Vendor  
Service Station

## Miscellaneous price break values

Setup Charge \$  per color / location

PMS Color Match \$  per color

Scatter Color \$  per color

Less Than Min Charge %  per item

Rush Charge %  per item

Fig. 9a

Production information

List Price	\$	<input type="text" value="50.30"/>	per item
List Description	<input type="text" value="List price is for one color one"/>		
Regular Time	<input type="text" value="0"/>	Business days	
Rush Time	<input type="text" value="0"/>	Business days	
Country of Manufacturer	<input type="text" value="United States"/>		
Union Made	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes		

Save | Cancel    Net | Case | MSRP | Other |

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FIG. 9b



## Product Configurator

New Corporate Gear Item Template - Clock

## Goods Category Information - Clock

Sub Category

Digital

Colors

 Ash  
 Black  
 Blue  
 Brown

Material

Aluminum

## Quantity Break Pricing Information

	Minimum	Maximum		Minimum	Maximum
Sample	1	2	Break 1	100	500
Break 2	501	0	Break 3	0	0
Break 4	0	0	Break 5	0	0
Break 6	0	0	Break 7	0	0
Break 8	0	0	Break 9	0	0

Create process &  
template message  
goes here.

## Miscellaneous Pricing Information

Misc Charge 1

☐ \$

☒ %

per location

Name

Raised Location

Misc Charge 2

☒ \$

☐ %

per item

Name

Date Display

Less Than Min Charge

☐ \$

☒ %

per item

Rush Charge

☐ \$

☒ %

per item

Misc Charge 3

☐ \$

☐ %

per color

Name

Misc Charge 4

☐ \$

☐ %

per color

Name

## Imprint Positions

Top	

FIG. 10

Create Product:

Exhibit PM-I Item Definition Page - Product Manager enters Item information 04/12/20



## Product Configurator

New Product - Clock - Digital (Aluminum)

### General Information - Clock - Digital (Aluminum)

Product Name Aluminum Pro Digital Clock

Vendor ID Number ABC003

Item Description

The best in digital technology displaying your custom logo

Colors

Black

Blue

Brown

### Quantity price break values

#### Net Pricing

1 - 2	\$20.00
100 - 500	\$14.00
501 - +	\$12.00

### Miscellaneous price break values

Raised Location, % 10 per location

Date Display, \$ 4.00 per item

Less Than Min Charge % 15 per item

Rush Charge % 20 per item

Enter your Vendor  
Service Station

Imprint Positions



Top

3 x 3 in.

FIG. 11a



Shipping Information

Weight per item	Weight per case	Items per case
<input type="text" value="2"/> lbs	<input type="text" value="20"/> lbs	<input type="text" value="100"/>
Case width	Case height	Case length
<input type="text" value="13"/> in.	<input type="text" value="13"/> in.	<input type="text" value="13"/> in.

Production Time(s)

Regular Prod.	Rush
<input type="text" value="12"/> working days	<input type="text" value="3"/> working days

Production information

List Price	\$ <input type="text" value="512.00"/> per item
List Description	<input type="text" value="Price does not include processing"/>
Country of Manufacturer	<input type="text" value="Germany"/> 
Union Made	<input type="text" value="No"/> 

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FIG. 11b

Exhibit PM-  
Image

Image Upload Page - Product Manager uploads images for Items  
or Processes 04/12/00



## Vendor Service Station

Product Manager

[Administrator](#) | [Product Management](#) | [Home](#)

Product Managers -  
Enter pricing and  
specifications for a  
product.

Small Image:	<input type="text"/>	<input type="button" value="Browse"/>
Medium Image:	<input type="text"/>	<input type="button" value="Browse"/>
Large Image:	<input type="text"/>	<input type="button" value="Browse"/>

[Upload](#) [Cancel](#)

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FIG. 12



# Product Configurator

New Process Template - Screen Printing

Administrator | Product Management | Home

## General Information - Screen Printing

Sub Category Number of Colors 

Process on Material

☐ Aluminum  
☐ Brass  
☐ Ceramic

Over Imprint Size Add



Process Not Available

## Quantity Break Pricing Information

	Minimum	Maximum		Minimum	Maximum
Break 1	<input type="text" value="100"/>	<input type="text" value="1000"/>	Break 2	<input type="text" value="1001"/>	<input type="text" value="1500"/>
Break 3	<input type="text" value="1501"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>	Break 4	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>
Break 5	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>	Break 6	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>
Break 7	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>	Break 8	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>
Break 9	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>	Break 10	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>

Create process &  
template message  
goes here.

## Miscellaneous Pricing Information

Setup Charge ☒PMS Color Match ☒

Misc Charge 1



Name

Misc Charge 2



Name

Less Than Min Charge



Rush Charge

Metallic Thread  
Charge

Misc Charge 3



Misc Charge 4



Save | Cancel

FIG. 13

04/12/00



## Product Configurator

New Process - Screen Printing - Standard

## General Information - Screen Printing - Standard

Process Name Vendor ID Number 

Process Description

Process on Material

Imprint Limitations

 x  In. or larger than  x  In.

Over Imprint Size Add

% 

## Quantity price break values

## Net Pricing

	1 Color	2 Color	3 Color
100 - 1000	<input type="text" value="\$0.50"/>	<input type="text" value="\$0.90"/>	<input type="text" value="\$1.30"/>
1001 - 1500	<input type="text" value="\$0.40"/>	<input type="text" value="\$0.78"/>	<input type="text" value="\$1.10"/>
1501 - +	<input type="text" value="\$0.30"/>	<input type="text" value="\$0.65"/>	<input type="text" value="\$0.80"/>

Enter your Vendor  
Service Station

## Miscellaneous price break values

Setup Charge \$  per color / locationPMS Color Match \$  per colorScatter Color \$  per colorLess Than Min Charge %  per itemRush Charge %  per item

FIG. 14a



Production information

List Price	\$	<input type="text" value="\$0.30"/>	per item
List Description	<input type="text" value="List price is for one color one"/>		
Regular Time	<input type="text" value="0"/>	Business days	
Rush Time	<input type="text" value="0"/>	Business days	
Country of Manufacturer	<input type="text" value="United States"/>		
Union Made	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes		

[Save](#) | [Cancel](#) | [Net](#) | [Case](#) | [MSRP](#) | [Other](#) |

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FIG. 14b

Mugs - Plastic Travel Mug (Plastic)

Exhibit PM-I- Item Definition Page Edit - Product Manager edits Item  
Edit Information 24/12/80



## Product Configurator

Edit Product - Mugs - Plastic Travel Mug (Plastic)

### General Information - Mugs - Plastic Travel Mug (Plastic)

Product Name   
CG Number   
Vendor ID Number   
Item Description



Colors

☐ Black  
☐ Blue  
☐ Brown

### Quantity price break values

#### Net Pricing

1 - 2	<input type="text" value="\$15.00"/>
100 - 500	<input type="text" value="\$9.00"/>
501 - 1000	<input type="text" value="\$8.00"/>
1001 - +	<input type="text" value="\$7.00"/>

### Miscellaneous price break values

Gift Box \$  per item  
Less Than Min Charge \$  per item  
Rush Charge %  per job

Enter your Vendor  
Service Station

### Imprint Positions

☒ Front ☐ Handle  
 x   x

F16.15a

# Mugs - Plastic Travel Mug (Plastic)

## Shipping Information

Weight per item

0 lbs

Weight per case

50 lbs

Items per case

100

Case width

12 in.

Case height

12 in.

Case length

12 in.

## Production Time(s)

Regular Prod.

14 working days

Rush

7 working days

## Production information

List Price \$ 7 per item

List Description Price does not include processing

Country of Manufacturer China

Union Made No

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FIG.15b

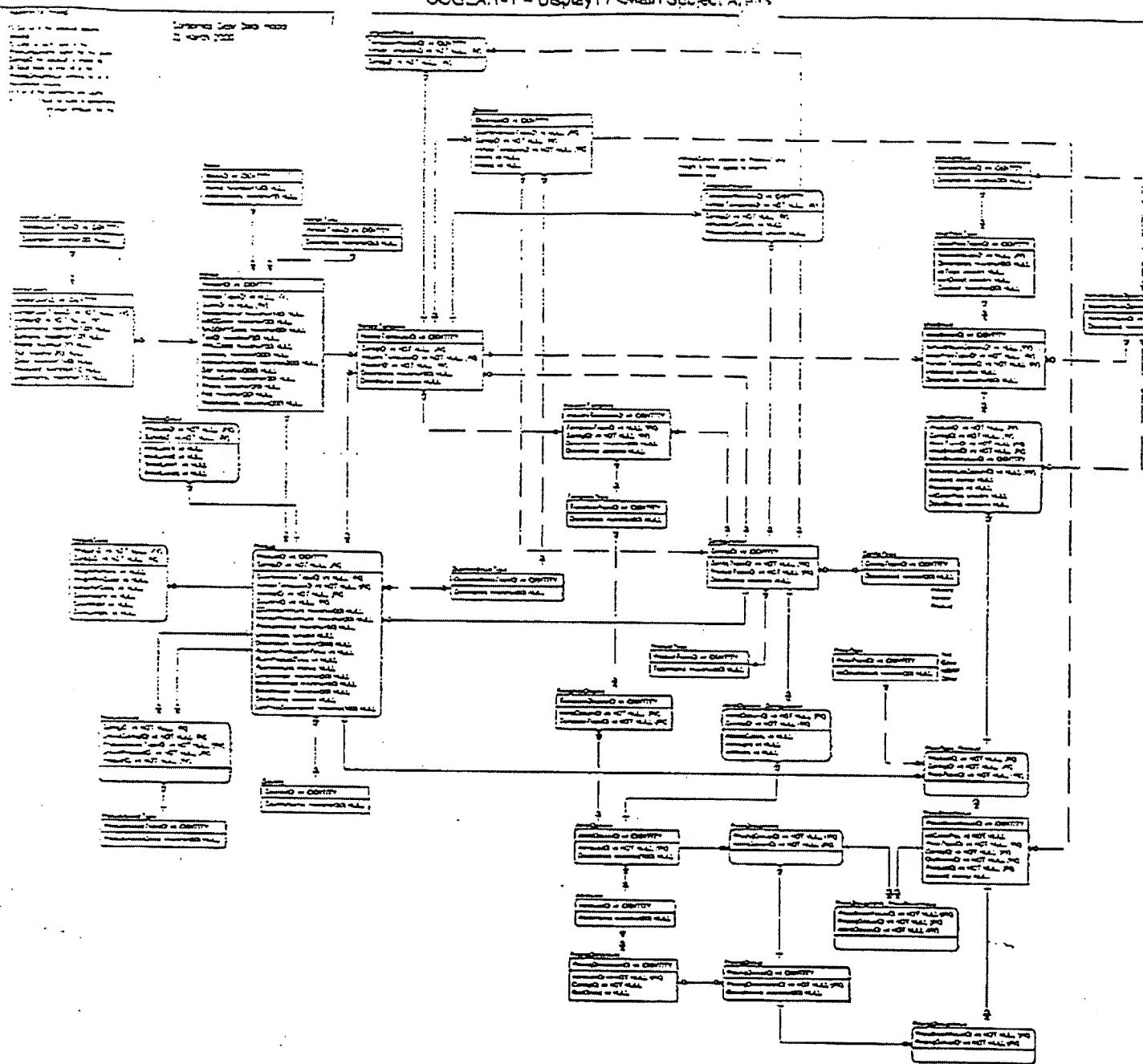


FIG.16

## EXHIBIT B



US007127415B1

**(12) United States Patent**  
**Verchere****(10) Patent No.: US 7,127,415 B1**  
**(45) Date of Patent: Oct. 24, 2006****(54) METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR ACQUIRING  
BRANDED PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS****(75) Inventor: David Verchere, New York, NY (US)****(73) Assignee: Regency Ventures Ltd., Hamilton  
Bermuda (GB)****(\*) Notice:** Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this  
patent is extended or adjusted under 35  
U.S.C. 154(b) by 505 days.

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**(21) Appl. No.: 09/441,204****(Continued)****(22) Filed: Nov. 16, 1999****FOREIGN PATENT DOCUMENTS****(51) Int. Cl.**  
**G06Q 30/00 (2006.01)**

WO WO 97/24691 \* 7/1997

**(52) U.S. Cl. 705/26; 705/27; 705/37****OTHER PUBLICATIONS****(58) Field of Classification Search 705/26-27,  
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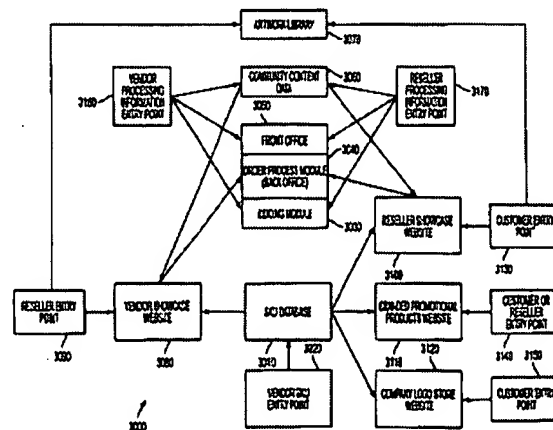
See application file for complete search history.

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**(57) ABSTRACT**

A method and system allows users to purchase branded promotional products over the Internet through a central, real-time exchange process. Users may include customers, resellers, vendor partners, business service partners and media partners. This system provides a core foundation of services for use over the Internet that facilitates business transactions thereby providing a single point of contact for all branded promotional industry needs. A comprehensive solution is presented for all members of the promotional products industry where high quality products, current and accurate information, and support services with the result that the end user has a consistent, reliable and productive experience are made available.

**18 Claims, 4 Drawing Sheets**

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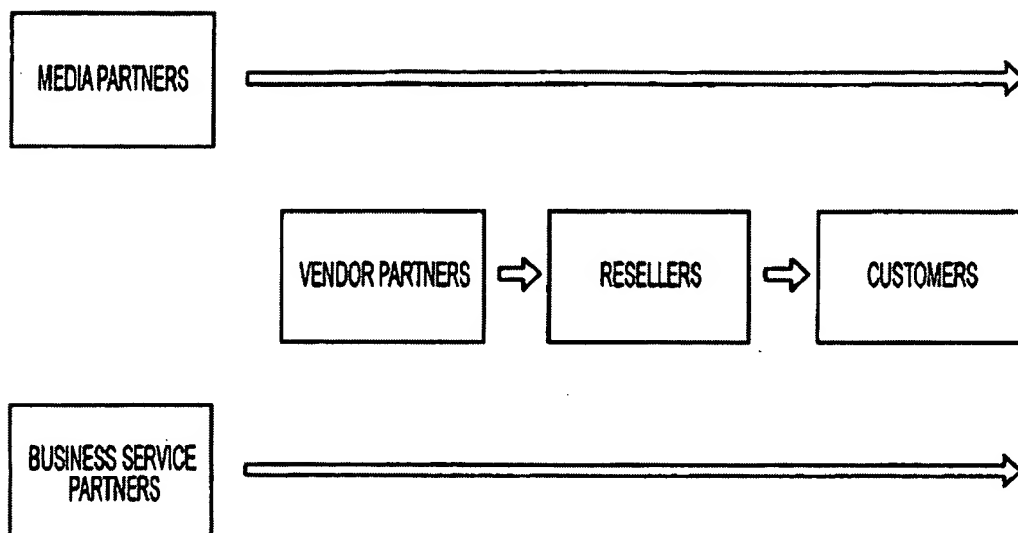
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**FIG. 1**  
PRIOR ART



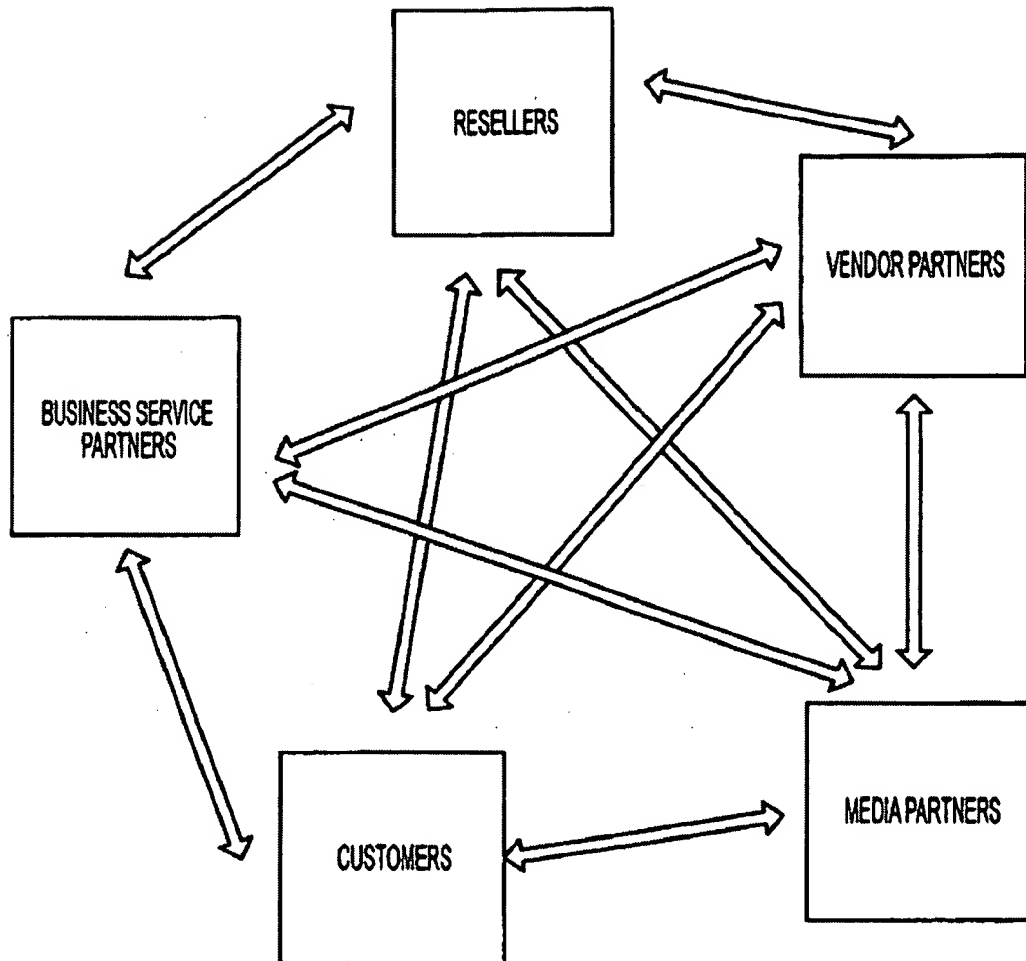


FIG. 2

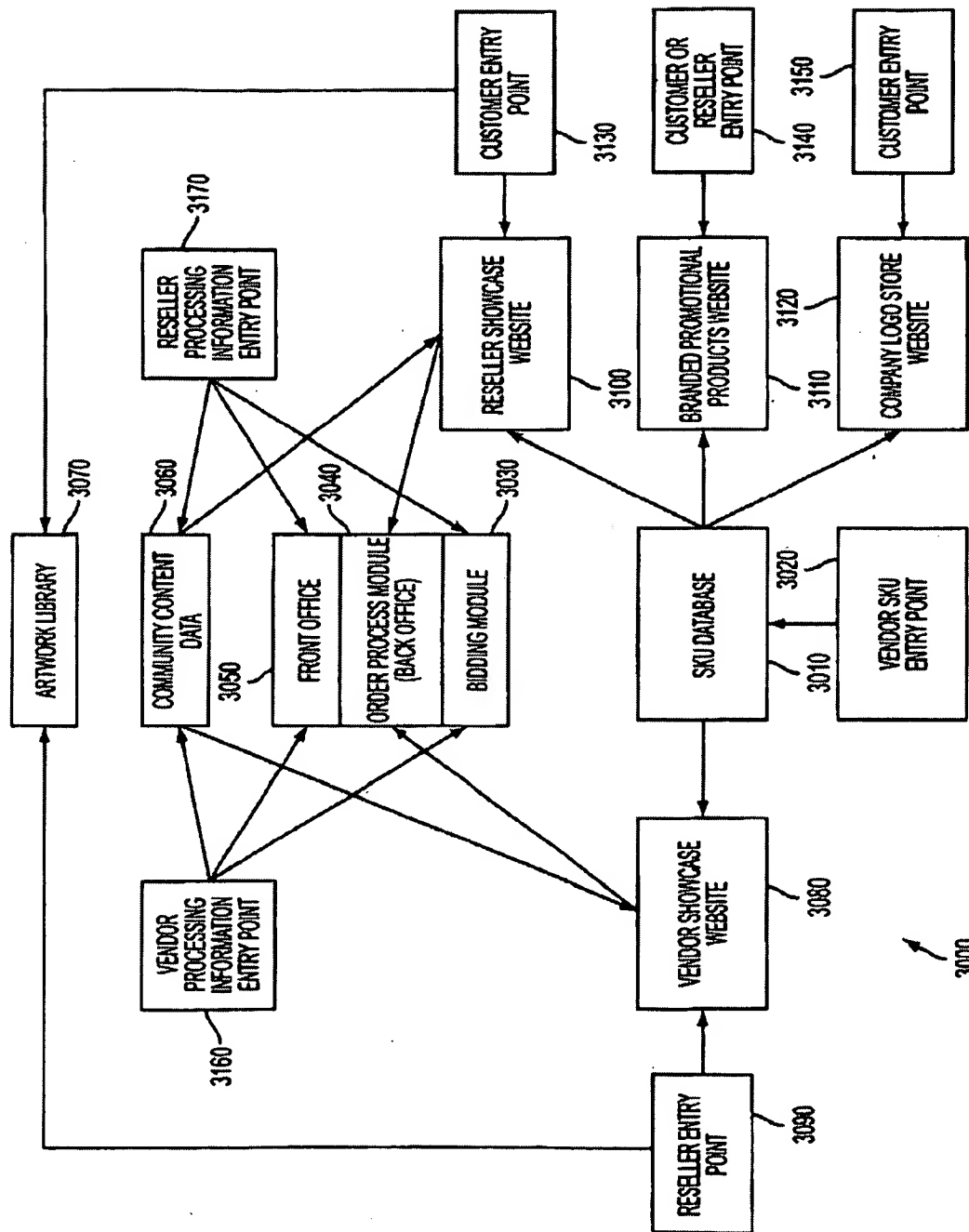


FIG. 3

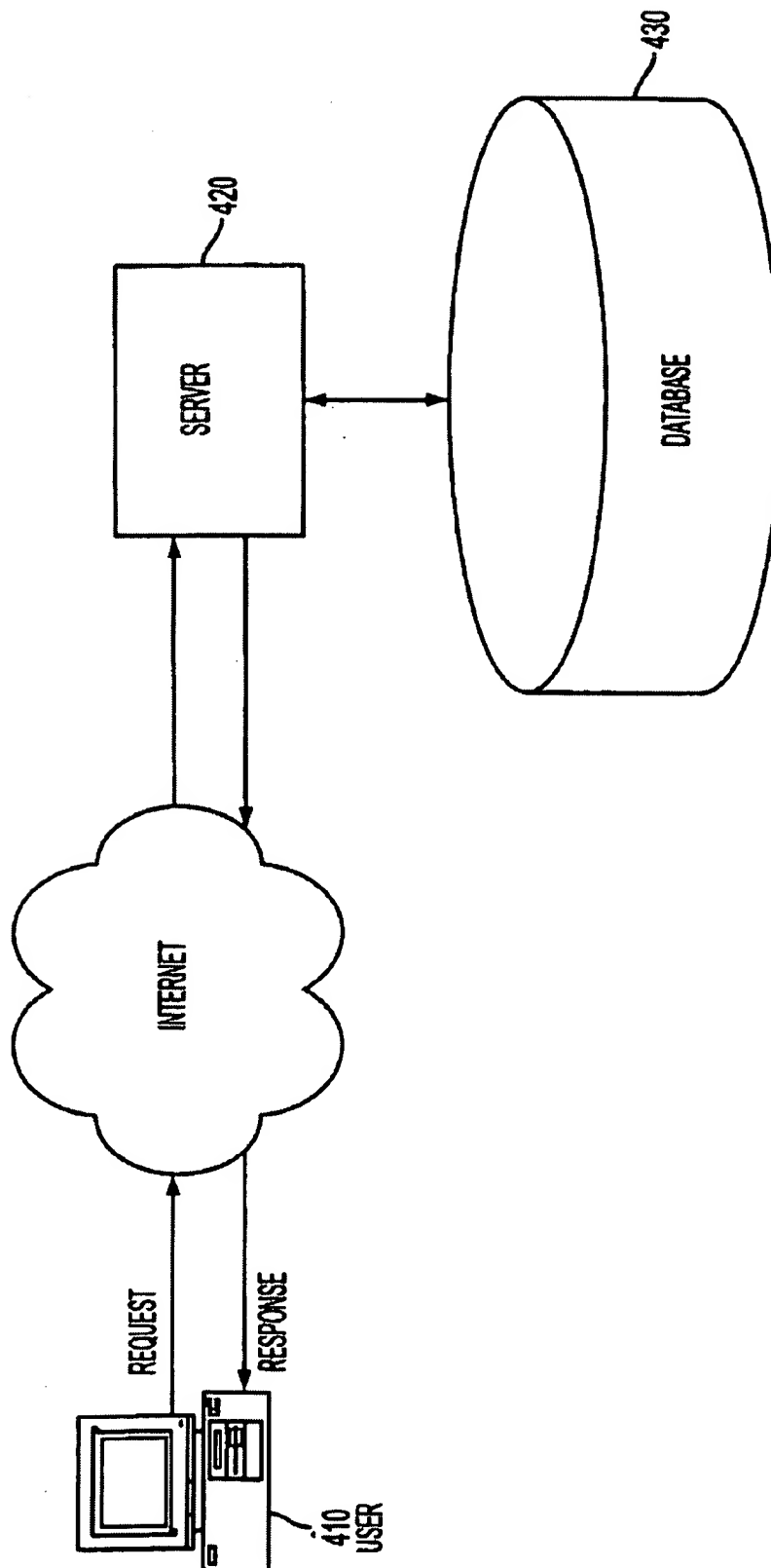


FIG. 4

## METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR ACQUIRING BRANDED PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS

### FIELD OF INVENTION

The present invention relates to the field of methods and systems of purchase within the branded promotional products industry.

### BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Branded promotional products include advertising, sales promotion and marketing communications media that use merchandise imprinted with an advertiser's identification, message or logo. These items effectively communicate a brand identity or a message and are used to create brand awareness, solidify customer relations and increase sales. The branded promotional products sector of the advertising industry provides unique marketing opportunities. Branded products are easy to understand and are useful in meeting many marketing objectives such as announcing a name change or building a company image.

The personal touch inherent in gift giving makes branded product advertising a high-impact tool when used in conjunction with other media. Typical uses include building brands, launching products, introducing reminder advertising, improving customer relations, generating new customers and/or accounts, increasing traffic and awareness at trade shows, safety programs, annual meetings, seasonal events, public relations, employee relations, and other advertising and marketing uses.

Branded promotional products are adopting a more active role in marketing as mass media such as print and television integrate with other promotional efforts. Because branded products provide a personal touch, they are effective and important marketing tools.

Customers increasingly expect more value from their purchasing experience with a high quality product that promotes their brand. They want a useful product obtained through a convenient transaction. Customers are often frustrated because they have to rely on a reseller for purchasing options and the flow of information. Resellers are expected to find customers favorable prices, produce samples and ensure timely delivery.

Currently, vendor partners have little or no contact with customers and rely on resellers to reach customers. Vendor partners spend significant amounts of effort and money providing price quotes and samples to resellers. It is difficult for vendor partners to gather product or customer market research and customer buying pattern information.

Traditionally, the promotional products industry has operated under a linear supply-chain model of distribution. Typically, the customer hires a reseller to assist in selecting a branded product for an event or promotion. The reseller locates the desired merchandise through established vendor partner relationships. The vendor partner manufacturers or imports the items, adds the brand, and ships the product. Business service partners provide services such as shipping, financing, and insurance. Media partners deliver educational and other useful information.

Thus, a comprehensive solution for all members of the promotional products industry that includes high quality products, current and accurate information, and support services with the result that the end user has a consistent, reliable and productive experience is needed.

## SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

An object according to the present invention is to overcome these and other drawbacks with existing systems.

It is an object of the present invention to create a central, real-time exchange serving customers, resellers, vendor partners, business service partners and media partners.

It is another object of the present invention to provide customers with a fast, cost efficient and simplified e-commerce solution to promote a brand.

It is another object of the present invention to provide resellers with the opportunity to leverage their sales efforts by streamlining the process of sourcing and pricing products and automating tedious administrative tasks.

It is another object of the present invention to provide vendor partners with an e-commerce end-to-end business solution to manage the cataloging, production and distribution process.

It is another object of the present invention to provide business service partners with the opportunity to offer services such as shipping, insurance, and financing.

It is another object of the present invention to provide media partners with the opportunity to provide resources, such as educational materials, literature and conference information to members of the promotional products industry.

The present invention provides an all-encompassing exchange that offers scaling opportunities and economies not available in the traditional business model. An online industry standard pipeline for data and order flow manages the production and distribution process from beginning to end. The present invention offers a selection of high value, high quality promotional products available online. The process of selection, pricing, ordering and branding of merchandise is facilitated through the present invention. In addition, support services including shipping, financing, insurance and other essential business services are provided by the present invention. Market and customer research information is also available.

Other objects and advantages of the present invention will be apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art upon reviewing the specification herein.

### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a diagram of a traditional promotional products industry under a linear supply chain model of distribution.

FIG. 2 is a diagram of a central real-time exchange according to the present invention.

FIG. 3 is a detailed diagram of a central, real-time exchange according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 4 is a diagram of an overall system according to the present invention.

### DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The present invention provides a central real-time exchange. This exchange creates a community environment for all participants in the promotional products industry and provides services that establish a web presence for each member. Business-to-business services available to each member through the exchange promotes operational efficiency and cost effectiveness. The goal of the exchange is to build a core foundation of services for use over the Internet.

that provides an easy and global method of facilitating business transactions amongst its members in a common environment.

Members of the promotional products industry may include customers, resellers, vendor partners, business partners and media partners. Customers may be an end-user of promotional products. Usually, customers include individuals who buy products directly through the present invention. Resellers may be distributors who resell goods and services to the customer. Vendor Partners may include suppliers who offer products and imprinting services. Media Partners may offer content, e.g., industry magazines, industry research organizations, and expert columnists. Business Service Partners may offer services such as fulfillment, shipping, insurance and financing.

The present invention provides customers with an easy, efficient method of purchasing branded promotional products online. The present invention enables customers to browse through a set of products of interest. The customer's logo and artwork may be securely maintained in a readily available personal or corporate online library. Customers are also provided with the ability to view their firms' logo applied directly to the products selected. The production and delivery of orders online may be tracked by the present invention where the customer is given access to the order status on demand. In addition, reminders for recurring events may be sent to the customer. The present invention may also create custom web pages for corporate clients to manage their branding program and products.

The present invention provides resellers the opportunity to leverage their sales efforts by streamlining the process of sourcing and pricing products and automating tedious administrative tasks. Other services may include a selection of high quality products from vendor partners; timely information on new products; seasonal and special offers; online order tracking; shipping, insurance and financing options; customer ordering; demographic and usage data and market research information.

The present invention provides vendor partners the ability to manage the cataloging, production and distribution processes. The present invention may collect, house and distribute product images, specifications, and pricing information. Vendor partners may update this information online and on demand. The present invention may track order, production and billing information flow and make this information available online; arrange financing to eliminate accounts receivable and credit risk; and record customer, ordering, demographic and usage information. Also, vendor partners may create and maintain unique web-site and datalinks. Vendors partners may also bid on customer orders through the present invention. Thus, the present invention provides an incentive for vendor partners to continue entering data and maintaining data as accurately as possible by offering the ability to resell the information.

The present invention may leverage web site income by developing additional sources of revenue from business service partners. Services such as fulfillment, shipping, insurance, financing and other sources of revenue may be offered to facilitate the order process and to lower overall costs.

The present invention provides media partners the ability to resell educational materials, literature and conference information and sell space for industry-relevant advertising. The present invention provides a forum where any member of the promotional products industry may find and purchase appropriate resources.

FIG. 1 is a diagram of a traditional promotional products industry under a linear supply-chain model of distribution. In this model, the customer hires a reseller to find a branded product. The reseller locates the product to be branded through a vendor partner. The vendor partner provides the product requested, imprints the logo or brand and ships the product to the reseller who then sells the product to the customer. Business service partners provide various services, such as shipping, financing and insurance. Media partners provide educational materials, literature, conference information and other useful information.

FIG. 2 is a diagram of a central real-time exchange model according to the present invention. Each member of the promotional products industry may exchange information and requests over the Internet. This promotes efficiency and facilitates business relationships. One object of the central real-time exchange is to bring the members of the industry together in a business-to-business e-commerce environment over the Internet. Another objective is to standardize the practices in the industry by providing efficient services for each member.

FIG. 3 is a detailed diagram of a central real-time exchange according to an embodiment of the present invention. The overall exchange structure 3000 may be programmed to be stateless in a preferred embodiment. This allows for greater scalability as well as database protection.

The Stock Keeping Unit ("SKU") database 3010 may include vendor product, pricing, service, and imprinting information. A SKU is assigned to every vendor partner product including variations within a product category. For example, a blue pen has a different SKU than a red pen. Vendors may enter product information in the SKU database at vendor entry point 3020. Information entered may include general product information; imprinting information based on dynamic product entry; quantity breaks; net pricing per quantity; net setup costs by imprint method, number of locations, and number of imprint colors; net run charges per quantity based on imprint colors; a markup percentage added for each quantity to create their own retail pricing and other similar product information. Vendors may also enter a flag to delete a product and all associated artwork files. Vendors may upload an original product artwork file at any time for any or all SKUs generated for a product.

The vendor may specify calendar dates to display his or her products on the web-site of the present invention. Vendors may elect product placement at an editorial level, product placement at a homepage level, or search position product placement. The product placement at an editorial level allows vendors to position an SKU in the content area of the web-site of the present invention. The product placement at a homepage level allows vendors to position a SKU on the homepage of the web-site of the present invention. The search position product placement allows vendors to select the position of product display in a search. Also, the search position product placement may be selected based on product list, price point, category, idea or department, text search, and other criteria. This feature allows vendors to select exact placements of products depending on the popularity of the product and marketing strategies.

Vendor Showcase Web-site 3080 may display vendor product information and provide inquiry and ordering access to resellers at the reseller entry point 3090. Vendors may customize their web-site by choosing which SKU images to display on their showcase web-site and other features available. Vendors may offer various services on their web-site to resellers. For example, resellers may order products for their

customers from the Vendor Showcase Web-site, receive price information, create purchase quotes for customers, and other related services.

The Branded Promotional Products web-site 3110 provides a variety of promotional products, inquiry and ordering access to customers and resellers at 3140.

Services available may include the ability to view a selection of high quality products and their images; select products based on a variety of criteria; view the product unit price, setup price, and run charges; offer a quote service showing prices at quantity breaks and order products from the web-site where orders may be charged to a credit card or to a credit account opened with the present invention. In addition, customers and resellers may receive acknowledgements for orders placed; attach artwork files; order history listing quotes and acknowledgements; review industry and media content; select services provided by business partnerships; select shipping method; customize a search and receive other similar options available to a customer or reseller.

Reseller Showcase Web-site 3100 may display products selected by the reseller for resale to his or her customer at 3130. Resellers may customize their showcase web-site by choosing which SKU images to be displayed. Resellers may choose to display non-branded SKU images or their own logo on the SKU images.

Resellers may offer various services to their customers through their Showcase Web-site 3100. Such services may include allowing the customer to view the product unit price, setup price and run charges; offering a quote service for customers to generate a quote for themselves showing prices at quantity breaks; ordering products from the web-site; attaching artwork files and other product related services.

Company Logo Store Web-site 3120 may display products selected by a particular reseller or store owner for resale to his or her customers at 3150. Company Logo Stores include a specialized showcase web-site carrying products branded with a particular company's logo. Resellers may offer various services to customers on their Company Logo Site. Such services may include allowing the customer to view the product unit price; offering a quote service for customers to generate a quote for themselves showing prices at quantity breaks; allowing customers to order products from the web-site; selecting services provided by business partnerships and other related services.

Order Process Module or Back Office 3040 may check credit, process orders and generate appropriate payment and accounting entries. Back Office 3040 may process orders which includes receiving orders from credit card processing, checking the credit account, reviewing/editing and releasing the purchase order to the product and/or an imprinting vendor, creating vouchers, calculating financing charges, sending automatic email responses back to customers or resellers when an order is actually shipped and providing other related services.

As to the Vendor Showcase Web-site 3080, Back Office 3040 may review/edit and release purchase orders to the Branded Promotional Products web-site 3110, review/edit and release change order purchase orders on an existing order and provide other similar services.

As to the Reseller Showcase Web-site 3100, Back Office 3040 may review/edit and release purchase orders to the Branded Promotional Products web-site 3110, review/edit and release change order purchase orders on an existing order, and provide other similar services.

As to the Company Logo Store, the services mentioned above may also be offered along with the ability to view product inventory balances.

The Front Office 3050 provides communication between members of the promotional products industry. It may also provide order status and history information. Services available to customers and resellers may include viewing/editing reseller or customer descriptive shopper information; viewing reseller or customer order history and purchases; viewing vendor order status, due date and shipping information for an order; directing email to customers or resellers on order delays and updates, updating customer or reseller service histories, viewing current balance on term accounts and providing other related services.

Specific Vendor Showcase Web-Site 3080 services may also be made available through the Front Office 3050. Vendors may view reseller shopper information, view reseller order history and purchases, send automatic email responses back to the reseller when the order is shipped, and other related options.

Services available to customers may include viewing/editing customer shopper information; viewing order history and purchases; viewing vendor order status, due date and shipping information; sending automatic email responses to customers when order is shipped, delayed or updated, and other related services.

Specific Reseller Showcase Web-site 3100 services may include viewing customer shopping information; viewing customer order history and purchases; sending automatic email responses informing the customer of the status of the order and other related services.

Company Logo Store 3120 services may include viewing order history; viewing/editing shopper information; viewing status, due date, shipping information, current balance and other related services.

In addition, Front Office 3050 may offer market information services for vendors, resellers and customers, such as account summary option, web hits habit reports, and other related market information.

Bidding Module 3030 may provide a forum where resellers or customers present orders and vendors bid on these jobs. Bidding Module 3030 may provide services such as posting price bids on products or imprinting orders; editing or withdrawing bids before terms are accepted; quality control on bids; sending automatic email notices to vendors on being awarded the order; and other related services.

Vendors may post price bids on products or imprinting orders on an auction site provided by the Bidding Module 3030. Resellers may view the auction site and see price bids related to their product or service and even send automatic email notification to resellers and reseller's customers.

Community Content Data 3060 may provide an interface with media partners and business partners where customers, resellers and vendors are offered various services. Vendor may enter processing information at 3160 and Resellers may enter processing information at 3170.

Media or business partners may offer services on the Branded Promotional Products Web-site 3110. These services may include posting job listings pertaining to the promotional product industries, providing education to customers, providing "Ask the Expert" services to customers, providing an alert system for customers, and informing the customer of industry statistics and advanced reports. In addition, design services on web-sites may be provided for customers, resellers or vendors to include artwork recommendations, creation and retouching.

The Artwork Library 3070 may store customers' logos and branding artwork. Customers may create a library and store their company brand logos online. This makes it easier for customers to put their logos on promotional products. Customers may share their art library with other users by granting them access with a password. In addition, customers may add, edit and delete their logos in their art library.

FIG. 4 is a diagram of an overall system according to the present invention. The user 410, who may be a customer, a reseller, a vendor partner, a business service partner or a media partner, may request a product or service from server 420 through the Internet. Server 420 then retrieves the requested information from database 430. A response is presented to the user once the requested information is obtained.

In a preferred embodiment, the present invention may use Microsoft's internet operating system, Microsoft Site Server Commerce Edition as the e-commerce shopping solutions, Microsoft SQL Server, Microsoft technologies Transaction server and Message queue as data layer servers.

Other embodiments and uses of the invention will be apparent to those skilled in the art from consideration of the specification and practice of the invention disclosed herein. The specification and examples should be considered exemplary only.

What is claimed is:

1. A computer implemented system for acquiring branded promotional products comprising:

a database containing product information wherein the product information comprises product data and imprinting data related to a plurality of branded promotional products;

a products interface where a customer or a reseller accesses the products interface to acquire at least one branded promotional products;

a reseller showcase interface where a customer accesses the reseller showcase interface to acquire at least one branded promotional products;

a vendor showcase interface where a reseller accesses the vendor showcase interface to acquire at least one branded promotional products;

a front office interface for providing purchase order information and marketing information and receiving at least one order from one or more resellers or customers wherein the at least one order is related to the plurality of branded promotional products;

a bidding interface for enabling at least one or more resellers or customers to present at least one order and enabling at least one vendor to bid on the presented order wherein the at least one order is related to the plurality of branded promotional products;

an artwork library interface for storing customer's logo and branding artwork associated with the plurality of branded promotional products; and

a processor for processing orders received from the front office interface;

wherein the database, the products interface, the reseller showcase interface, the vendor showcase interface, the front office interface, the bidding interface, the artwork library interface and the processor are interoperably connected.

2. A computer implemented method for acquiring branded promotional products comprising the steps of:

maintaining a database containing product information wherein the product information comprises product data and imprinting data related to a plurality of branded promotional products;

implementing a products interface where a customer or a reseller accesses the products interface to acquire at least one branded promotional products;

implementing a reseller showcase interface where a customer accesses the reseller showcase interface to acquire at least one branded promotional products;

implementing a vendor showcase interface where a reseller accesses the vendor showcase interface to acquire at least one branded promotional products;

implementing a front office interface for providing purchase order information and marketing information and receiving at least one order from one or more resellers or customers wherein the at least one order is related to the plurality of branded promotional products;

implementing a bidding interface for enabling at least one or more resellers or customers to present at least one order and enabling at least one vendor to bid on the presented order wherein the at least one order is related to the plurality of branded promotional products;

implementing an artwork library interface for storing customer's logo and branding artwork associated with the plurality of branded promotional products; and processing orders for products received from the front office interface through a processor.

3. A computer implemented system for providing a central exchange of data associated with branded promotional products, the computer implemented system comprising:

a product database for storing data related to a plurality of products, the data including at least pricing data and imprinting data related to the plurality of products;

a vendor entry point interface for enabling a vendor to enter at least one product data specifics to the product database, the at least one product data specifics comprising one or more of imprinting data, display data, accurate detailed pricing data and product placement data;

a vendor showcase interface for displaying product data and providing ordering access to one or more resellers at a reseller entry point interface, wherein the vendor showcase interface is customized for a particular vendor;

a branded promotional products interface for providing a plurality of promotional products to one or more of customers and resellers and receiving at least one order for one or more promotional products;

a reseller showcase interface for displaying products selected by the reseller for resale to a reseller group of customers selected by the reseller where the reseller group of customers accesses the reseller showcase interface at a reseller customer entry point interface; and

a company logo store interface for displaying products selected by the reseller for resale to a group of customers associated with a company, wherein the company logo store interface is customized for the company;

wherein customers comprise users who buy products from the branded promotional products interface; resellers comprise users who resell products to customers; and vendors comprise users who supply one or more of products and imprinting services;

wherein the product database, the vendor entry point interface, the vendor showcase interface, the branded promotional products interface, the reseller showcase interface, the company logo store interface are interoperably connected.

4. The system of claim 3, further enabling one or more customers to schedule reminders for a recurring event related to ordering promotional products.

5. The system of claim 3, further comprising:

a back office interface for processing the orders for the plurality of promotional products.

6. The system of claim 3, further comprising:

a front interface for providing one or more of order status data, historical information related to orders and market information services wherein the market information services comprise one or more of account summary options and web hits habit reports.

7. The system of claim 3, further comprising:

a bidding interface for enabling one or more of resellers and customers to present at least one order and enabling a plurality of vendors to bid on the presented at least one order.

8. The system of claim 3, wherein the resellers comprise distributors and the vendors comprise suppliers.

9. The system of claim 3, further comprising an artwork library interface for storing artwork associated with at least one of the plurality of products.

10. The system of claim 3, wherein the at least one order is tracked and order status data is provided.

11. A computer implemented method for providing a central exchange of data associated with branded promotional products, the computer implemented method comprising the steps of:

storing data related to a plurality of products, the data including at least pricing data and imprinting data related to the plurality of products at one or more product databases;

enabling a vendor to enter at least one product data specifics at a vendor entry point interface, the at least one product data specifics comprising one or more of imprinting data, display data, accurate detailed pricing data and product placement data;

displaying product data and providing ordering access at a vendor showcase interface to one or more resellers at a reseller entry point interface, wherein the product data is customized for a particular vendor;

providing a plurality of promotional products to one or more of customers and resellers and receiving at least one order for one or more promotional products at a branded promotional products interface;

displaying products selected by the reseller at a reseller showcase interface for resale to a reseller group of customers selected by the reseller where the reseller group of customer accesses the reseller showcase interface at a reseller customer entry point interface; and

displaying products selected by the reseller for resale to a group of customers associated with a company at a company logo store interface, wherein the products are customized for the company;

wherein customers comprise users who buy products from the branded promotional products interface; resellers comprise users who resell products to customers; and vendors comprise users who supply one or more of products and imprinting services.

12. The method of claim 11, further enabling one or more customers to schedule reminders for a recurring event related to ordering promotional products.

13. The method of claim 11, further comprising the step of:

processing the orders for the plurality of promotional products.

14. The method of claim 11, further comprising the step of:

providing one or more of order status data, historical information related to orders and market information services wherein the market information services comprise one or more of account summary options and web hits habit reports.

15. The method of claim 11, further comprising the step of:

enabling one or more of resellers and customers to present at least one order and enabling a plurality of vendors to bid on the presented at least one order.

16. The method of claim 11, wherein the resellers comprise distributors and the vendors comprise suppliers.

17. The method of claim 11, further comprising the step of:

implementing an artwork library interface for storing artwork associated with at least one of the plurality of products.

18. The method of claim 11, wherein the at least one order is tracked and order status data is provided.

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